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SUBJECT: SPAIN: AMBASSADOR CALLS ON OPPOSITION LEADER

Classified By: Ambassador George L. Argyros, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Popular Party leader Mariano Rajoy, meeting with the Ambassador June 30, was upbeat about the PP's showing in the June European Parliament elections and in the party's prospects to regain power. Rajoy upbraided the Zapatero government for causing strains with Washington and for Zapatero's subordination to the French. Rajoy reaffirmed the PP's pro-US orientation and the party's support for the deployment of additional Spanish troops to Afghanistan. Rajoy said he would seek reaffirmation as the PP's Secretary General at the next party congress in September. End Summary

¶2. (C) Ambassador and poloff met July 1 with Mariano Rajoy, Secretary General of the opposition Popular Party (PP) and

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unsuccessful presidential candidate in Spain's March 14 elections. Rajoy was positive and upbeat during the meeting, saying he enjoyed his role in the opposition but looked forward to defeating the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) whenever the next elections take place. Rajoy believed the PP achieved an excellent result in the June 13 European Parliament elections by winning nearly as many seats as the PSOE (only one seat fewer) and only two percentage points fewer in total votes, particularly since PSOE "based their entire campaign on the Iraq pullout."

¶3. (C) Rajoy stated the PSOE has spent most of its time since taking office reversing policies or projects of the PP. The Zapatero government has shifted foreign policy away from the transatlantic relationship and toward France, has reversed PP education reforms and has squelched a controversial plan approved by the Aznar government to transfer water from rivers in the north to the arid south. The PSOE has fanned anti-American sentiments in Spain to gain political advantage.

¶4. (C) Rajoy assured the Ambassador the PP maintains the same foreign policy it did while Aznar was in office, not only with respect to the U.S. but also in terms of Spain's relationship with Europe. The PP is extremely troubled by Zapatero's strong shift toward Europe and his apparent desire to side with France "at every opportunity."

¶5. (C) Ambassador asked Rajoy what he thought of Zapatero's performance at the NATO Istanbul Summit. Rajoy replied he was perplexed that Zapatero inexplicably left the summit before the first day had concluded. He also felt Zapatero made a mistake supporting France's opposition to sending the NATO Response Force to Afghanistan. This was yet another example of Zapatero blindly following France's lead, said the PP leader.

¶6. (C) On Afghanistan, Rajoy said he was certain the government would send additional troops to Afghanistan, including a battalion to assist with election security. The PP will support the deployment.

¶7. (C) Rajoy said he believes that in terms of economic policy, PSOE chose a fine minister of economy in Pedro Solbes. He is the most talented member of Zapatero's cabinet. Solbes has had to brake a number of initiatives by other ministries and the big outstanding question is whether he will continue to be able to hold off policies that are bad for the economy.

¶8. (C) Regarding his own future, Rajoy said he intended to remain the PP Secretary General. Rajoy said he would present himself as a candidate at the party's national convention expected to be held in October.

¶9. (C) Comment: The close result in the June 13 European Parliament election has revived the confidence of the PP leadership, which had been shaken by the PP's unexpected defeat in last March's general election. A poor showing on June 13 would have increased pressure for an alternative to Rajoy to emerge within the party. Rajoy's position now appears secure. Many in the PP expect the Socialist government to unravel over the next two years. They predict a less robust economic climate and a crisis over the PSOE's inability to deal with nationalist demands, including from within the party's own Catalan wing.

ARGYROS